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C O N F I D E N T I A L ASMARA 000079

DEPT FOR AF/E, LONDON AND PARIS FOR AFRICA WATCHERS

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TAGS: [KPKO](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [ER](#) [ET](#)
SUBJECT: UNMEE BIDS FAREWELL

REF: A. ASMARA 39
[B.](#) ASMARA 27
[C.](#) 08 ASMARA 511

Classified By: Amb. Ronald K. McMullen for reason 1.4(d)

[¶1.](#) (C) Summary: The UN Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea (UNMEE) has finally closed down its operations in Eritrea, according to the acting UN resident representative. All remaining staff left on February 28, bound for Sudan on a chartered UN flight. UNMEE sent out all sensitive equipment on the same flight and donated to the Government of Eritrea all materiel not already shipped from Massawa. End summary.

[¶2.](#) (C) After months of delay and conflicting guidance from the Government of Eritrea, UNMEE was able to meet, just barely, its end of February departure deadline. The GSE mysteriously held UNMEE staff passports for almost two weeks before finally granting them exit visas. UNMEE personnel were concerned the GSE would impose last-minute delays, but in the end they were all able to board the UNcharted flight to Khartoum via Al Fasher. Many UNMEE staff are taking up new assignments in Darfur. Dr. Lebohang Moleko, deputy special representative of the SYG, also left on Saturday.

[¶3.](#) (C) All sensitive equipment, including weapons, computers, and communications equipment also went out on the chartered flight. As reported reftels, most usable equipment was containerized and shipped out from Massawa to other UN missions or to Brindisi. At the last minute, the GSE made a bid for some of this materiel, but it had already been loaded on the ship. The GSE agreed to accept the donation of items such as tents and cots located in the TSZ. Leftover fuel stocks comprising 9,000 liters of gasoline, 3,000 liters of diesel and 1,500 liters of kerosene were left with the main UN office. According to the acting resident representative, UNFPA chief Dirk Jena, all UN agency chiefs are casting a covetous eye on this fuel cache. The UN country team may vote to distribute it among the agencies, rather than keep it as a strategic reserve, which is Jena's preference.

[¶4.](#) (C) The GSE took back the UNMEE office building, losing the monthly \$80,000 in hard currency UNMEE was paying. Other UNMEE sites in Asmara were located on land the GSE leased permanently to the UN. During the early 2000s, WHO, UNHCR, UNICEF, FAO, and WFP outgrew the main UN compound and moved out, mostly to office buildings vulnerable to attack. Jena would now like to redevelop the main UNMEE camp and bring the agencies back into the compound for security reasons and also to promote better inter-operability. With UNMEE's departure, Jena is looking ahead to improving communication with the GSE about its development agenda, including adopting the GSE's suggestion that the UN agencies consolidate and streamline their programs.

[¶5.](#) (C) Comment: UNMEE's departure came off without a hitch,

but the GSE kept up its combative attitude toward UNMEE until the end, allowing national pride to win out over its need for UNMEE's equipment and consumables. The departure of UNMEE may open up some political space for the UN to improve its standing with the GSE. For certain, Asmara has become an even quieter town.

MCMULLEN